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Number of off-licences linked to harmful drinking among young people

Areas with a large concentration of off-licences are likely to have higher numbers of young people going to hospital because of drinking, according to latest research.

A [study](#) from the charity Alcohol Concern says that alcohol availability, more than any other external factor, is the main cause of alcohol-specific hospital admissions in a tenth of cases of young people under the age of 18. It found that nearly 10 per cent of all alcohol-specific hospital admissions for under-18s in England, excluding London, can be attributed to the number of off-licences in an area. Between 2006 and 2009, 19,367 children and young people under the age of 18 were admitted to hospital with alcohol-specific conditions. More than 1,900 of these admissions can be directly attributed to the number of off-licences in a young person's local area.

The findings back up calls from NICE to reduce the number of outlets selling alcohol in a given area, and the days and hours when it can be sold. In June 2010, NICE produced [public health guidance](#) on preventing the development of hazardous and harmful drinking, which set out these recommendations on alcohol availability. It says international evidence suggests that an effective way of reducing alcohol-related harm is by making it less easy to buy alcohol.

NICE adds that one action that could be taken, is for licensing departments to take into account the links between the availability of alcohol and alcohol-related harm when considering licence application.

The research by Alcohol Concern also found that on average, for every two off-licences per 100,000 population, there was one young person under-18 who was admitted to hospital because of drinking.

And the researchers believe that actual numbers of alcohol-related incidents are likely to be higher, as figures cited are based on alcohol-specific harms such as alcohol poisoning.



So head injuries or sprains and falls and attendances in accident and emergency departments, despite being alcohol-related, may not be recorded by hospitals as alcohol-based harm.

The research additionally states that an increase in the numbers of off-licences in England has led to a rise in the availability of alcohol in the home to young people under18.

Between 1998 and 2008, the number of people who said they usually bought alcohol from a friend or relative increased from 9 to 24 per cent.

This is said to happen through what is known as 'shoulder-tapping' friends, family and passers-by outside alcohol-selling outlets.

Don Shenker, Chief Executive of Alcohol Concern, said: "It is a sobering thought that the numbers of off-licences in any one area has an impact on under-18s drinking and ending up in hospital." "It is a failing of the current system that so many licences are being granted without due consideration to young people's health." Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance UK and Royal College of Physicians special adviser on alcohol, added: "This research further underlines the need for a comprehensive alcohol strategy from the government, which tackles the affordability, promotion and the availability of alcohol."

NICE recently published a [commissioning guide](#) on services for the identification and treatment of hazardous drinking, harmful drinking and alcohol dependence in children, young people and adults.

The guide sets out a comprehensive approach to commissioning alcohol services and identifies certain essential components of a high-quality alcohol service. These include commissioning services for children and young people who are vulnerable to alcohol related harm. The commissioning guide can be found alongside all our other guidance on alcohol in the [NICE Pathway](#) on alcohol use disorders.

The study "*One on every corner: the relationships between off-licence density and alcohol harms in young people*" is available [here](#).